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ABSTRACT

Proof of the value of bilingual education programs is usually based on evaluations which measure success solely on the basis of student test scores. An alternative method of evaluating such programs as it is implemented in three bilingual education programs in Connecticut elementary schools is reported in this paper. Eleven first- and second-grade Spanish/English classrooms containing a total of 257 students were visited twice a month for four months in 1986 to identify and describe the administrative, curricular, and instructional practices that contribute to program success. These characteristics were identified through qualitative methods such as classroom observations, interviews, and reviews of curricular materials. Qualitative data were then linked to students' test scores to provide a more accurate measure of program success than test scores alone could have provided. Program characteristics identified as contributing to success included: numerous opportunities for students to write; presence of a strong core curriculum in the bilingual education program matching the district's all-English curriculum; a well-defined plan for transitioning students to English reading and writing; highly-trained teachers; access to curricular materials; strong support for the native language as a bridge to learning English; principal support; and integration and acceptance into the mainstream school structure. An 11-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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# READING AND WRITING INSTRUCTION IN THREE BILINGUAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN CONNECTICUT

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The English Only movement which has been spreading across the country during recent months has increased the burden of proof on educators to show that bilingual education programs are working. Proof is usually based on results of program evaluations which tend to measure success solely on the basis of student test scores without regard to alternative measures of success, the contexts in which the programs operate, or the implementation problems which the programs face. This paper presents an alternative evaluation study of reading and writing instruction in three bilingual education programs in Connecticut elementary schools. Eleven first- and second-grade Spanish/English classrooms containing a total of 257 students were visited twice each month from March to June of 1986 to identify and describe the administrative, curricular, and instructional practices which contribute to program success. These characteristics were identified through qualitative methods such as classroom observations, interviews, and review of curricular materials. Qualitative data were then linked to students' test scores to provide a more accurate measure of program success than test scores alone could have provided.

Evaluations of bilingual education programs have traditionally measured program success by analyzing participating students' scores on standardized achievement tests. Few evaluations link these student outcomes to classroom instructional practices or to the sociocultural contexts in which the programs operate. As a result, most evaluations of bilingual education programs fail to consider indicators of success other than test score gains, and fail to explain why some programs are more successful than others.

This paper presents an alternative method of evaluating the success of bilingual education programs which has been implemented in three elementary schools in Connecticut. The evaluation research study was designed to identify and describe the administrative, curricular, and instructional practices which contribute to student success in reading and writing. Rather than focusing exclusively on student outcomes, the study was designed to be a formative evaluation, analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of program operations which contribute to the final outcomes.

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## Research Design

### The Sample

Since the intent of this study was to describe effective program designs and instructional strategies, it was logical to choose a sample of schools where the bilingual programs appeared to be working particularly well. Therefore, the three schools were chosen according to criteria similar to those used by Tikunoff (1985) in his studies of Significant Bilingual Instructional Features; that is, the three participating schools were nominated by their districts' bilingual directors as having particularly effective bilingual education programs.

In addition to sharing the common trait of perceived effectiveness, the three programs under study also share similarities in district size, urban location, language of instruction, grade level, and types of students served. Thus, participants in this study constitute neither a representative nor a random sample of bilingual education programs. Instead, the programs were purposely selected on the basis of three criteria so that some meaningful generalizations could be drawn to the majority of bilingual education programs in the state.

First, only Spanish/English bilingual programs were selected, since 93% of the limited English proficient students in the state's bilingual education programs are native speakers of Spanish (Prince, 1987). Second, first- and second-grade bilingual classes were selected, since over half of the students served in Connecticut programs are enrolled in the early elementary grades (K-3). Third, large urban districts were selected because of their similarity in size and in types of students served. Students in the bilingual programs in these three districts are, in general, highly mobile and of low socioeconomic status, and the language used in their surrounding environments is almost exclusively Spanish. More than 75% of Connecticut's limited English proficient children live in these three cities. In all, six first-grade and five second-grade classes from three schools in three different districts were included. A total of eleven teachers and 257 students participated in the study.

### Data Collection

The researcher visited each of the three schools for one full day twice a month, from March to June of 1986, moving between classrooms as

necessary to observe instruction. Reading and writing instruction were of primary interest, though at times the researcher also observed instruction in other subject matter areas, such as social studies, math, and science, since students used the reading and writing skills which they were acquiring throughout the entire school day. Efforts were made to avoid interrupting instruction whenever possible, so that the classrooms could be observed in their most natural states and disruptions could be kept to a minimum. When teachers had spare moments during planning periods, after school, between classes, or during lunch, they provided information about their lesson plans, daily classroom routines, and individual students' progress.

Through a combination of classroom observations, review of curricular materials and district guidelines, and informal interviews with teachers, students, and administrators, descriptions of the bilingual education programs in each school (particularly the reading and writing components) were constructed. In order to create such descriptions, a qualitative evaluation framework which covered three areas of inquiry (Curriculum, Instruction, and Program Administration) was adapted from Cohen (1980), Spencer and Valencia (1982), and Tikunoff (1985). The purpose of this framework was to focus the researcher's classroom observations on the most salient features of program operations in the three schools. The framework used appears in Table 1.

**TABLE 1**

**Qualitative Framework Used to Evaluate Reading and Writing Instruction in the Bilingual Education Department**

## Curriculum

(1) Is a formal reading and writing curriculum available? Is this curriculum comparable to the one used in non-bilingual education classrooms?

(2) What materials are being used in each language to teach reading and writing? Are sample materials and resources available?

(3) Are the materials for teaching reading and writing equally good in both languages?
   (a) Have they been equally well field-tested?
   (b) Do both provide equally good systems of informative

feedback for students?
(c) Do both contain equally interesting stories?
(d) Do both review previous material to reinforce vocabulary and structures?
(e) How do they compare on the sequences or concepts covered?

(4) How much time is allocated for reading and writing instruction in the native language? In English?

(5) On what bases are decisions made to test students in English reading or in native language reading each year? Do the tests which are used match the curriculum which is taught?

## Instruction

(1) In which language did the students begin reading? What was the rationale for this decision?
(a) Primary language?
(b) English
(c) Both simultaneously?

(2) How are instructional objectives in reading and writing set?

(3) How do teachers assess student progress? What are the indicators of achievement in reading and writing in each language?

(4) Is there a particular reading method or combination of methods being used for teaching reading in each language? (For example, the language experience approach, the phonetic approach, the basal reading approach, etc.)

(5) Do students at a particular grade or grouping all use the same book? Do they progress at the same or at individualized paces? How are they grouped for reading instruction?

(6) On what basis are decisions made to transition students from native language reading instruction to English reading instruction?

(7) Who is responsible for providing English and native language

literacy instruction? Is individual support available? Peer tutoring? Are aides' lesson plans coordinated with the teachers'?

(8) Is there evidence of "active" teaching?

(9) Does the teacher alternate between languages if appropriate?

(10) Does the teacher integrate English language development with the integration of academic skills?

(11) Does the teacher know, understand, and use the child's cultural background to improve instruction?

(12) Do teachers hold high expectations?

(13) Do teachers attempt to analyze why learning does not occur?

## Program Administration

(1) Are bilingual children accepted or are they viewed as a separate group within the school?

(2) Is the principal able to articulate and demonstrate a strong commitment to the bilingual program?

(3) Are regular classroom teachers able to describe and demonstrate that they support the bilingual program?

(4) Is the native language displayed visually in the classroom? In the school?

(5) What types of training (formal and informal) have staff received in reading and writing instruction and in bilingual reading and writing methodology?

(6) Does the school employ a reading specialist? If so, are his or her services available to the bilingual education program? Are other support services which are available to children in all English classrooms (e.g., Chapter 1 Tutoring) also available to students in the bilingual program?

At the end of the year, quantitative data were also collected so that student outcomes could be linked to instructional practices. During 1985-86, the first year of the longitudinal study, these scores served as baseline data from which to measure future gains. With the continued cooperation of the school districts, student progress were tracked for a period of several years in order to measure long- term program impact.

The following section briefly describes the theoretical model upon which judgements of effective instructional practices were based. The model draws upon research in both second language acquisition and reading instruction. Its purpose is to explain the relationship between primary language development and academic achievement in order to build an argument for literacy instruction in the native language.

## A Model For Bilingual Literacy Instruction

Cummins (1981a) proposes that literacy-related language proficiency skills in all languages share a Common Underlying Proficiency, or CUP. According to Cummins, experience with either language can promote development of the proficiency underlying both languages, given adequate motivation and exposure to both, either in school or in the wider environment. Studies supporting the CUP model, which have been reviewed by both Cummins (1981a) and Troike (1978), have shown that when cognitively demanding communication skills (such as comprehending text or writing an essay) have been well-developed in the first language and children have developed a certain minimum, or threshold, level of proficiency in the second language, skills learned in the first language will successfully transfer to the second. Thus, a bilingual program which teaches students to read well in Spanish can actually help the eventual acquisition of English reading skills.

## The Importance of Sociocultural Context

Since the Common Underlying Proficiency model proposes that increasing proficiency in any one language can also increase proficiency in any other, one might argue that language minority children in the United States could just as easily be instructed in the majority language, English, from the outset. Support for this argument can be drawn from several Canadian studies which found that English-speaking children successfully learned to read English after being taught to read initially in their second language, French (see Lambert and Tucker, 1972; Swain, 1978). The fatal error in this argument lies in the fact that it ignores the sociocultural contexts

surrounding these very different types of bilingual programs. "In American schools, as in those of every country, theory and research can answer questions about literacy, how it is learned, and how best to teach it, but that information must be put into a social-cultural context to make basic bilingual educational curriculum decisions" (Goodman et al., 1979,p.20).

Examination of the sociocultural contexts in which bilingual programs operate in the United States and in Canada reveals that language minority students in the U.S. differ from the language majority students studied in Canada on a number of measures. Perhaps the most important difference is the extremely high rate of mobility found among limited English proficient (LEP) students in the United States. A decision to provide initial reading instruction in English to highly mobile children creates the danger of producing students who are illiterate in two languages, because the amount of time needed to develop the level of proficiency in a second language which is adequate to handle cognitively demanding academic skills is much greater than is widely believed. Research suggests that the average amount of time required to develop face-to-face communication skills in English is only about two years, but students may require as many as five to seven years to develop age-appropriate academic skills (Cummins, 1981b).

Given the fact that it could take as long as five to seven years before LEP students could read well enough to handle challenging academic instruction in English, it would be extremely unwise to teach highly mobile groups of language minority children in the United States to read English first, and not their home language. A great number of the children would be likely to move out of the school long before they had fully mastered English reading, and without ever having developed reading ability in their native language, either. Only in situations where attendance is stable (as was the case in the immersion studies in Canada), could such a design prove successful.

Such is not the case in Connecticut, however. During the 1985- 86 school year, close to one out of every five limited English proficient pupils in the state was regarded as transient. Over 1,500 students (or 14% of the total number of students served) spent less than ninety instructional days in a bilingual program. Two-thirds of the transient students simply moved out of their districts before the end of the year (Prince, 1987). Given this pattern of mobility, it makes sense to teach highly transient groups of students (such as Puerto Rican children in Connecticut) to read in their home language first.

## Applying the Model to Classrooms

On the basis of this theoretical model, we would expect an effective bilingual education program for elementary level Spanish-speaking students in Connecticut to follow five principles:

(1) The program would provide initial literacy instruction in Spanish.

(2) While students were learning to read and write in Spanish, the program would provide oral instruction in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

(3) When students had become fluent readers of Spanish and they had become orally proficient in English (usually after about two or three years), the program would introduce English reading.

(4) The program would continue to develop Spanish reading skills even after students had begun to read in English.

(5) Students would be allowed to remain in the bilingual program for several years in order to develop threshold levels of biliteracy.

These principles are proposed only as a general rule, since programs for students with different characteristics would probably operate in quite different sociocultural contexts. These differences must be considered whenever one attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of a program. The following section describes the evaluation contexts in which the three sample programs in this study operate.

## The Evaluation Context

According to data compiled for School Year 1984-85, 165 local public school districts operate in Connecticut, serving close to one-half million students in Grades K-12 (Connecticut State Department of Education, 1986). One-fifth of these students are racial and ethnic minorities; 8.6% are linguistic minorities. Eighty-three different languages are spoken by limited English proficient students in the state. Hispanics, primarily Puerto Ricans, comprise the vast majority of non- English speakers. The most recent U.S.

Census figures (1980) show that 35,000 Connecticut children between the ages of five and seventeen come from homes where only Spanish is spoken (Connecticut State Department of Education, 1985). In addition to being the largest language minority population in Connecticut, Hispanics also represent the fastest growing population group, and their percentage of total school enrollment is expected to increase dramatically by the end of the century. Between 1970 and 1985 alone, Connecticut's Hispanic population nearly doubled (Connecticut State Department of Education, 1985).

Since 1977, twelve districts in Connecticut have received state funds to operate bilingual education programs for students dominant in Spanish, Portuguese, Laotian, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Italian, Polish, and Haitian Creole. The number of language groups served by the bilingual program in each of these districts varies from one to five. During the 1985-86 school year, the twelve bilingual education programs served 11,482 students. The majority of participating students (71%) were enrolled in Grades K-5, and Spanish dominant students comprised 93% of the state's limited English proficient population (Prince, 1987).

The three districts which were chosen for this study are all located in large, urban areas of Connecticut, with a mean estimated 1984 population of 134,016. Although Connecticut has the highest per capita income in the country, the disparity between rich and poor is enormous. The three cities which house the school districts under study have some of the highest rates of child poverty in the nation, ranging from 41.1 - 52.1% (Connecticut State Department of Education, 1986). Community data compiled by the Connecticut State Department of Education for School Year 1984-85 (see Table 2) revealed that estimated 1983 per capita income and average median family income were three times higher in Connecticut's wealthiest communities than in the three cities under study. Approximately one-third of the families residing in these cities lived below the poverty level, and one-half of the children lived in single-parent families. The level of education for adults over the age of 25 was also low relative to other areas of the state. Slightly more than half of the adults had graduated from high school, and only one-tenth to one-fifth had graduated from college.

District level data compiled by the Connecticut State Department of Education for School Year 1984-85 (see Table 3) reflect patterns similar to those found in the community data in Table 2. The three districts under study tend to have high enrollments of students who are minorities (83%), who speak a language other than English at home (33%), and who are economically disadvantaged (47%). The 1984-85 figures showed that

students in these districts were much more likely to enter the labor market immediately upon graduation than to enroll in four-year colleges, whereas the reverse pattern was true for students from wealthy communities.

**TABLE 2**
**Selected Community Data**

| | Average for 3 Research Sites | Statewide Average | Average for 3 Wealthiest Communities |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1984 Population (Est.) | 134,016 | 3,144,792* | 20,551 |
| 1983 Per Capita | $ 8,013 | $ 11,908 | $ 26,296 |
| Median Family Income | $ 15,240 | $ 23,149 | $ 45,895 |
| Families Below Poverty Level** | 28 - 33% | 10% | 2 - 3% |
| Children in Single-Parent Families** | 42 - 51% | 18% | 8 - 13% |
| Persons 25+ with High School Diploma** | - 61% | 70% | 90 - 91% |
| Persons 25+ with College Degree | 9 - 20% | 21% | 48 - 49% |

**TABLE 3**
**Selected School District Data**

| | Average for 3 Research Sites | Statewide Average | Average for 3 Wealthiest Communities |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total Enrollment | 20,101 | 465,031* | 3,411 |
| Minority Enrollment | 83% | 21% | 4% |
| Non-English Home Language | 33%** | 9% | 2% |
| Economically Disadvantaged | 47% | 11% | 1% |
| High School Graduates Entering Labor Market*** | 34 - 47% | 29% | 5 - 13% |
| High School Graduates Entering 4-Yr. Colleges*** | 22 - 26% | 46% | 77 - 82% |

* Total

** This figure is based on available 1983-84 data, since one of the three research sites was unable to produce an accurate count of students who spoke non-English home languages in 1984-85.

*** Raw figures not available, so ranges of percentages across the three districts are presented.

(Source: Connecticut State Department of Education. Town and School District Profiles, 1984-85. Hartford, Ct: State Department of Education. 1986.)

## Implications of State and Local Contexts For Program Evaluation

The prevalance of factors in these communities which have been found to influence student achievement negatively, such as low levels of education among parents and high levels of poverty, have two important implications for the evaluation of educational programs. First, reasonable expectations for program participants must be established. As Goodman et al., (1979 p.14) point out: "Since bilingual groups within our schools often represent the economically poor within the United States, it is not surprising that these populations do not do well on standardized tests. Yet the validity of such tests is seldom challenged, and the results are often used to decide if programs are working or not."

The second implication, then, is that measures other than standardized test scores should also be used by evaluators to determine success in bilingual education programs. In the three programs under study, the following examples were just a few of the alternative indicators of success:

- In a second grade English arithmetic contest in which three all-English classes and two bilingual classes participated, the first-, second-, and third-place prizes were awarded to students from the bilingual classes.

- One of only two students in an entire school who were admitted to the district's Gifted and Talented Program was a second grade bilingual education student.

- In one school approximately 40% of the first graders in the bilingual program made the school Honor Roll during 1985-86.

- In a schoolwide science fair, the winning entry was submitted by a second grade bilingual education class.

The remainder of this paper is devoted to a discussion of other major findings in the areas of Curriculum, Instruction, and Program Administration.

## Curriculum-Major Findings

In general, the design of each program was based on the previously outlined theoretical model from Cummins (1981a), which suggested that a successful reading and writing program for Spanish speakers in the elementary grades would:

(a) introduce initial reading instruction in Spanish;
(b) provide simultaneous oral English language instruction;
(c) delay English reading until students can read fluently in Spanish and are orally proficient in English (usually after two or three years);
(d) continue to develop Spanish literacy skills even after students begin to read in English; and
(e) allow students to remain in the programs for several years to develop threshold levels of biliteracy.

The schools varied in how soon they introduced English reading, ranging from the end of second grade to as early as the beginning of first grade. Although achievement test results were positive at all three schools, the lowest reading scores were found among second graders at the school where (a) English reading was introduced earliest, (b) Spanish reading instruction was discontinued after students were partially mainstreamed for English reading, and (c) students exited the program earliest. This finding suggests that teachers at this school may be introducing English reading too soon, before students have developed Spanish reading skills which are strong enough to transfer successfully to English.

Each of the participating bilingual education programs had developed a formal reading and writing curriculum parallel to the district's all-English curriculum, but the degree to which it was implemented in the classrooms varied from school to school. Ideally, a bilingual education curriculum should meet three criteria:

(a) It should match the district's English curriculum in scope and sequence as closely as possible.
(b) Curriculum objectives should increase in difficulty across grades or levels.
(c) The curriculum should include a system for determining when each objective has been successfully mastered.

Of the three districts which participated in this study, one met all three criteria. The second district met the first two criteria but now needs to develop a consistent method of testing to determine when curriculum objectives have been met. The third district's curriculum will require the most work: The curriculum guide is too long to be of practical use, objectives are not matched to the materials teachers actually use in their classrooms, a testing system has not been developed, and the participating teachers did not use the curriculum guide to maintain records of student progress.

In two of the schools sufficient classroom supplies and textbooks were available. However, in one of the schools, both English and Spanish textbooks and curricular materials were in such short supply in the bilingual education classrooms that teachers wrote each reading group's entire lesson on the board every day. Students spent an excessive portion of instructional time simply copying from the board. This school was the only one of the three which has never received federal Title VII monies to purchase curricular materials and supplies.

Supplementary Spanish reading materials were also inadequate in two of the three schools. In one school half of the student population was limited English proficient, but less than 5% of the school's library books were in Spanish. In the other school, only two dozen Spanish library books were available for 170 students in the bilingual education program. Since the librarian at this school did not speak Spanish and had few Spanish materials, the library period was spent filling out English worksheets or watching English filmstrips. One of the teachers reported that a student had returned from the library with the English text of the Declaration of Independence as his choice for the week - hardly appropriate leisure-time reading for any seven- year-old, much less one who is learning English.

## Instruction-Major Findings

A characteristic common to each of the participating programs was that all of the observed teachers were highly- trained and had extensive teaching experience in bilingual and general education programs. All held Connecticut teaching credentials and nine of the eleven had either completed or were nearing completion of Master of Arts degrees in Bilingual Education, Early Childhood Education, or Special Education.

Another characteristic common to each program was that students were given plenty of opportunities to write, at first in Spanish and later in English,

as their language proficiency improved. Students wrote letters, daily class journals, reaction to field trips and news events, and endings to unfinished stories. Some of the excellent instructional practices observed in the classrooms which research suggests increase literacy skills and motivation included:

- reading aloud to children;
- setting aside time for sustained silent reading;
- encouraging children to practice reading to each other;
- using reading time to expand vocabulary in the native language and in English;
- relating stories to children's own experiences;
- maintaining classroom libraries.

Other activities in the schools which promoted literacy skill development included:

- a visit from a local librarian who helped students apply for library cards;
- a Book Fair, where Spanish and English books were on display for students to purchase;
- participation in the federal Reading Is Fundamental program, which provided free books in Spanish and in English for children to keep;
- participation in districtwide Spanish and English spelling bees.

## Program Administration-Major Findings

In two of the three schools the bilingual education classrooms were located next to all-English classes of the same grade, so that students from each program could participate in the other's activities. In the third school, where the bilingual education population was smallest and thus least visible, the bilingual education classes were isolated in a separate wing with the special education and kindergarten classes. This arrangement inhibited the participation of bilingual education students in mainstream school activities and should be discouraged for both bilingual and special education programs.

In the same school where program students were isolated, there was little evidence of support for the students' native language outside the bilingual education classrooms. No one in the main office spoke Spanish and

Spanish was not displayed visually in the school. In the other two schools Spanish bulletin board displays and signs for parents were seen throughout the halls. The principal at one school collected writing samples in Spanish as well as in English each month, attesting to the fact that success in Spanish was highly valued.

In all three schools, support services which were available to students in all-English classes, such as Chapter 1 tutoring, special education, gifted and talented education programs, and the services of reading specialists, were also available to students in the bilingual education programs. Inservice training sessions for all-English classroom teachers were also open to all bilingual education teachers. In addition, the bilingual education programs in each district offered training sessions specific to the needs of bilingual education staff.

## Conclusions

Program characteristics identified in these three bilingual education programs which contributed to success included: numerous opportunities for students to write, the presence of a strong core curriculum in the bilingual education program which matched the district's all-English curriculum, a well-defined plan for transitioning students to English reading and writing, highly trained teachers, access to curricular materials, strong support for the native language as a bridge to learning English, administrative support from principals, and integration and acceptance into the mainstream school structure. The alternative method of bilingual education evaluation used in Connecticut not only links student achievement to the context in which the programs operate, but also documents program implementation problems which affect outcomes so that these problems can be corrected. Connecticut's approach should serve as a model for other evaluations of bilingual education programs which seek to provide more thorough understandings of program operations and more accurate measures of program success.

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